



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

EXHIBIT 4
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HB 279

Testimony in Support of H.B. 279
Presented to the House Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Committee
February 7, 2013
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I am submitting testimony as a proponent for HB 279 on behalf of The Humane Society of the United States. Animal fighting is a felony in Montana. The title of the Montana's Animal Fighting law references spectators; however the wording for spectators was omitted from the body of the statute. HB 279 will fix this omission by prohibiting knowingly attending an animal fight. This bill simply restores the original intent of the law with a housekeeping fix.

What is animal fighting? Dog fighting is a sadistic "contest" in which two dogs are placed in a pit to fight each other for the spectators' entertainment and gambling. Under-performing dogs are often killed by extremely cruel means such as drowning or electrocution.

Cockfighting is a blood sport in which two birds are placed in an enclosure to fight to the death for the primary purpose of gambling and entertainment. The bird's legs are usually fitted with razor-sharp steel blades or with gaffs, which resemble three-inch long, curved ice picks. These artificial spurs are designed to puncture and mutilate.

Numerous law enforcement raids have unearthed many disturbing facets of this illegal "sport." Young children are sometimes present at the events and illegal gambling is the norm for animal fighting. The DEA has done multiple drug cartel cases where narcotics were being distributed through cockfighting pits. Simply put, animal fighting is a criminal activity that brings with it a range of other crimes. When omissions in our state law make our state an attractive destination for animal fighters we put our communities at risk.

Spectators provide much of the profit associated with animal fighting. The money generated by spectator admission fees and gambling dollars help finance these criminal operations. Even worse, many dogfighters and cockfighters use the spectator loophole to avoid prosecution. They simply abandon their animals at the first sign of a raid and claim to be present as mere spectators. In a dog fight the owner of a dog sometimes pays someone else to handle the dog in the fight while they sit in the stands, watching and gambling on the outcome. HB 279 would close this loophole and ensure the entire cast of characters that sustain illegal animal fights are prosecuted.

Dogfighting is a felony in all 50 states and cockfighting is illegal in every state. As other western states crack down on animal fighting we can count on dogfighters and cockfighters looking to Montana as a refuge where they can escape meaningful punishment if they get caught. HB 279 would help turn off this magnet and keep this problem from getting out of hand in our state.

Currently, Montana is the only state in the entire nation with no penalties for attending dog fights and one of only seven that allows attending cockfights. Yet it is clear, from the title of the existing statute, that there was legislative intent to prohibit all aspects of dogfighting and cockfighting, including attending these spectacles. Let's keep our communities safe from the illegal activities that go along with this criminal operation. I urge you to support HB 279.